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INFO AMEMBASSY QUITO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-COLOMBIAN RELATIONS, EVENTS IN
VENEZUELA

1. LEAD EDITORIAL IN COLOMBIA'S TOP NATIONAL DAILY "EL TIEMPO" (4/15) ENTITLED: "WARS AND CONTRADICTIONS," STATED: "CRITICISM OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS BY U.S. OFFICIALS AND CONGRESSMEN ON THE MANNER IN WHICH COLOMBIA IS CONFRONTING ITS CRISIS IS UNDERSTANDABLE. THEY WOULD LIKE MORE COHERENCE IN THE [THE GOVERNMENT'S] STRATEGY, AND MORE RESOURCES AND COMMITMENT BY THE COLOMBIAN PEOPLE. WITH RESPECT TO THE FORMER, THEY MAY BE RIGHT. THERE HAS BEEN TOO MUCH IMPROVISATION HERE IN SECURITY POLICY, TOO FEW RESULTS FROM THE WAY SOCIETY AND ITS LEADERSHIP HAVE CONFRONTED THE CONFLICT, AND TOO MANY MISTAKES BY THE ARMED FORCES. THE SITUATION IS NOW SERIOUS, ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE APPEAR NOT TO UNDERSTAND THIS."

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
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"ON THE SECOND POINT, THE U.S. CRITICS ARE NOT SO RIGHT. AS TO RESOURCES, COMMITMENT, AND SACRIFICE, THE INCONSISTENCY IN U.S. POLICY IS MORE APPARENT THAN OURS. A COUNTRY [I.E., THE U.S.] THAT NOT SUFFERED THE DEVASTATION AND PAIN THAT WE HAVE WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COST THAT COLOMBIA HAS HAD TO BEAR. [ESPECIALLY,] IN AN INTERNAL CONFLICT THAT, IN LARGE PART, RESULTS FROM AN OBSESSION TO ELIMINATE THE CULTIVATION OF ILLICIT CROPS BY COLOMBIAN PEASANTS RATHER THAN [FOCUS ON] MONEYLEAUNDERS, PURVEYORS OF PRECURSOR CHEMICALS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME, OR CONSUMERS (NEW YORK MAYOR BLOOMBERG, PERHAPS?)."

"IT SOMETIMES SEEMS THAT THE U.S. IS LAYING ODDS ON COLOMBIA LIKE A SPECTATOR AT A COCK FIGHT WHILE, HERE, THE NUMBER OF DEAD AND DISPLACED CONTINUES TO GROW. THEY SEEM TO PREFER AERIAL SPRAYING
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OF FARMERS' CROPS TO INTERDICTION OF AIRCRAFT USED TO TRANSPORT DRUGS. TO SAY THAT THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT IS NOT DEVOTING [ADEQUATE] RESOURCES TO THE WAR WHEN DEFENSE SPENDING IS THE ONLY PART OF THE BUDGET THAT HAS INCREASED IN THIS PERIOD OF FISCAL CRISIS IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF INCOMPREHENSION, IGNORANCE, OR CONVENIENTLY [AVOIDING THE TRUTH]."

"AMIDST AN UNPRECEDENTED TERRORIST WAVE COINCIDING WITH CURRENT EVENTS IN VENEZUELA, ANDRES PASTRANA TRAVELS ON TUESDAY TO WASHINGTON. THIS IS THE LATEST IN A LONG SERIES OF SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENTS CLINTON AND BUSH. THIS VISIT HAS SPECIAL RELEVANCE FOLLOWING THE FALL OF HUGO CHAVEZ, AN UNCOMFORTABLE INTERLOCUTOR, AND AT A TIME WHEN THE U.S. CONGRESS, IN AN ELECTION YEAR, IS RELUCTANT TO FOLLOW THE WHITE HOUSE IN THREE AREAS OF PROFOUND IMPORTANCE TO COLOMBIA: ATPA RENEWAL, LIFTING RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF ANTI-NARCOTICS ASSISTANCE, AND GRANTING SPECIAL STATUS FOR POLITICAL REFUGEES, KNOWN AS TPS."

"PASTRANA WILL THUS ARRIVE AT A MOMENT WHEN WINDS OF CHANGE ARE BLOWING IN [U.S.] POLICY TOWARD COLOMBIA. THEY RESULT FROM RECENT EVENTS, SUCH AS [U.S.] FOREIGN POLICY CHANGES IN THE WAKE OF SEPTEMBER 11, THE END OF THE PEACE PROCESS IN COLOMBIA, AND THE CAMPAIGN TO SELECT PASTRANA'S SUCCESSOR. IT'S [INSTRUCTIVE] TO LISTEN TO RECENT STATEMENTS. THE [HIRC] CHAIRMAN SPEAKS OF COLOMBIA AS "A POTENTIAL FIELD FOR BREEDING INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, PERHAPS ONLY COMPARABLE TO AFGHANISTAN." WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION, UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE MARC GROSSMAN, SAYS THAT COLOMBIA LACKS DEDICATION, COHERENCE AND RESOURCES IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST GUERILLAS, THE DRUG ECONOMY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THESE ARGUMENTS HAVE MERIT ... BUT MUST BE SEEN [IN A LARGER CONTEXT.] THE MOST SERIOUS [SHORTCOMING] IS THAT THE U.S. IS
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UNAWARE OF ITS OWN INCONSISTENCIES."

"[COLOMBIANS] HAVE PAID IN WAR AND DEATH THE SOCIAL AND MILITARY CONSEQUENCES OF FORCED ERADICATION UNDER PLAN COLOMBIA, WHOSE VISIBLE EFFECT ON NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING HAS BEEN LAUGHABLE. EXTENDING ATPA BENEFITS THAT WOULD ASSIST THE LICIT ECONOMY CONFRONT THE ILLICIT LANGUISHES IN CONGRESS. AND DECISIVE DEBATES, SUCH AS THE ONE UNDERWAY ABOUT REORIENTING COUNTER-NARCOTICS ASSISTANCE TOWARD COUNTERING INSURGENCY, ARE COLORED BY U.S. INTERESTS IN ITS WAR AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM WHICH HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH PRACTICAL PROBLEMS FACING COLOMBIA."

"IT IS AS IF THEY WERE DISTINCT WARS. AS IF THE TERRORISM THAT BUSH IS FIGHTING TODAY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT COLOMBIA IS EXPERIENCING, DESPITE THE FACT THAT OUR STRUGGLE IS FED IN LARGE PART BY WARS THE U.S. HAS DECLARED AND THEN FORGOTTEN OR CHANGED THE RULES. WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT PRESIDENT PASTRANA, WHO STILL ENJOYS CREDIBILITY IN WASHINGTON, WILL BE ABLE TO PUT THESE THINGS RIGHT."

2. LEAD EDITORIAL IN BUCARAMAGA-BASED REGIONAL DAILY "VANGUARDIA LIBERAL" (4/15) ENTITLED: "OUR PART," STATED: "NEWS REPORTS THAT 'U.S. DEMANDS RESULTS AGAINST TERRORISM AND QUESTIONS PASTRANA'

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... SHOULD PROMPT US TO SEARCH HONESTLY FOR SOLUTIONS TO OUR OWN PROBLEMS AND STOP THINKING IN TERMS OF AID AND STRATEGIES FROM ABROAD ... IT'S GOOD TO REFLECT ON SENTIMENTS EXPRESSED BY U.S. SENATORS ... BECAUSE [OF THE INSIGHTS AFFORDED] INTO FUTURE U.S. ACTIONS ... ACTING TOGETHER WE MUST FACE CORRUPTION ... A DYSFUNCTIONAL JUDICIAL SYSTEM, RAMPANT IMPUNITY, VIOLENCE AND LACK OF PRINCIPLES."

3. OP-ED BY COLUMNIST ALFREDO MOLANO IN "EL TIEMPO" ENTITLED: "THE COIN YOU'LL PAY WITH," STATED: "MR. GROSSMAN ... HAS ALREADY WARNED THAT THE WAR WILL HAVE TO BE PAID FOR BY COLOMBIANS. MR. ALVARO URIBE VELEZ HAD THOUGHT THE U.S. WOULD DO THE WORK FOR US FOR FREE..."

VENEZUELA

4. MEDIA PLAY: EVENTS IN VENEZUELA DOMINATED COLOMBIAN MEDIA PLAY OVER THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 13-15 AS NEWSPAPERS FIRST REPORTED THE CONSOLIDATION OF POWER BY INTERIM PRESIDENT CARMONA, THEN GROWING INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL AMBIVALENCE ABOUT HIS REGIME, AND FINALLY THE SURPRISING RETURN TO OFFICE OF A CHASTENED HUGO CHAVEZ. THE FOCUS OF SATURDAY'S PRINT COVERAGE, REFLECTED IN "EL TIEMPO'S" HEADLINE, "VENEZUELA: TOTAL ERASURE," FOCUSED ON THE CARDONA REGIME'S DISBANDING OF KEY INSTITUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH AND THROWING OUT DOZENS OF LAWS ENACTED DURING CHAVEZ' THREE-YEAR "BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION." A SYMPATHETIC PORTRAIT IN "EL TIEMPO"

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OF INTERIM PRESIDENT CARMONA, CHARACTERIZING HIM AS A
"CONCILIATORY LEADER", WAS JUXTAPOSED WITH PROMINENT REPORTING OF
NEGATIVE INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO THE VENEZUELA'S CHANGE OF
GOVERNMENT BOTH AT THE RIO GROUP'S MEETING IN SAN JOSE, COSTA

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RICA AND IN KEY REGIONAL CAPITALS INCLUDING MEXICO CITY AND BUENOS AIRES. ANALYSIS BY TIBISAY SOTO IN "EL TIEMPO" EXAMINED WHETHER THE EVENTS OF APRIL 11 WERE AN ILLEGAL MILITARY COUP D'ETAT OR AN AUTHENTIC POPULAR UPRISING.

5. MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS IN VENEZUELA RECEDED TO THE INTERNATIONAL PAGES ON APRIL 14, WHILE COLOMBIA'S OWN SECURITY PROBLEMS TOOK TOP BILLING, HIGHLIGHTED BY RECENT URBAN BOMBINGS IN VILLAVICENCIO AND BOGOTA, AND THE SPECTACULAR FARC KIDNAPPING OF 12 DEPARTMENTAL LEGISLATORS IN CALI ON APRIL 11. UNDER THE HEADLINE, "VENEZUELA WITHOUT CHAVEZ," COVERAGE IN "EL TIEMPO" BEGAN TO TAKE STOCK ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN CARACAS, CHARACTERIZING THE NEW REGIME AS OFFERING RELIEF FOR THE VENEZUELAN ECONOMY, BUT GRAVELY WEAKENED BY DOUBTS ABOUT ITS LEGITIMACY. AN ANALYSIS BY RODRIGO PARDO IDENTIFIED STABILITY OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT AS KEY TO ITS BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH COLOMBIA, DESPITE WIDESPREAD POPULAR BELIEF (BY A MARGIN OF 46 TO 30 PERCENT IN A SNAP POLL CONDUCTED BY "EL TIEMPO" AND THE RADIO SHOW, "LA FM" IN FIVE MAJOR COLOMBIAN CITIES) THAT CHAVEZ' DEPARTURE WOULD IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS. FURTHER ANALYSIS PUBLISHED IN "EL TIEMPO" ON APRIL 14 CITED THE FALL OF FIVE LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS (IN PARAGUAY, ECUADOR, PERU, ARGENTINA, AND VENEZUELA) DURING THE LAST 37 MONTHS AS CALLING INTO QUESTION THE REGION'S SUPPOSED NEW POLITICAL MATURITY.

6. DESPITE AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON LEADING COLOMBIAN PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDER ALVARO URIBE IN BARRANQUILLA ON APRIL 14,
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EVENTS IN VENEZUELA RETURNED TO THE FRONT PAGES ON APRIL 15. "EL TIEMPO'S" LEAD HEADLINE ANNOUNCED, "CHAVEZ RETURNS AND PROMISES CHANGE." UNDER THE INSIDE HEADLINE, "CHAVEZ WINS TRUST," ANALYSTS WERE CITED FOR THE PROPOSITION THAT "[MERE] ANNOUNCEMENT OF 'RECTIFICATIONS' IS NOT SUFFICIENT. HE OUGHT TO OCCASION CHANGES AND CORRECT ERRATIC POLICIES THAT FED DISCONTENT." JUST AS "EL TIEMPO" HAD CITED THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S SPOKESMAN IN ITS SATURDAY EDITION AS SAYING CHAVEZ'S OWN ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ACTIONS HAD PROVOKED THE POLITICAL CRISIS, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR CONDOLEEZA RICE WAS QUOTED IN MONDAY'S EDITION AS SAYING, WITH LITTLE ENTHUSIASM, "I HOPE HUGO CHAVEZ UNDERSTANDS THE MESSAGE HIS PEOPLE HAVE SENT HIM -- THAT HIS POLICIES DON'T WORK FOR THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE. I HOPE HE TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION TO CHANGE COURSE, THAT HE WAS REALLY MISTAKEN." ARGENTINE HISTORIAN TOMAS ELOY MARTINEZ AND THE MEXICAN NEWSPAPER "LA JORNADA" WERE CITED AS IMPLICATING THE UNITED STATES IN COLLABORATING WITH RIGHT-WING ELEMENTS OF VENEZUELA'S BUSINESS, MILITARY, AND CLERICAL ELITE IN THE ILL-FATED ATTEMPT TO TOPPLE CHAVEZ. END MEDIA PLAY.

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7. LEAD EDITORIAL IN "EL TIEMPO" (4/13) ENTITLED: "GLORY TO THE BRAVE PEOPLE," STATED: "ALTHOUGH CHAVEZ'S FALL WAS EXPECTED, EVENTS ON THURSDAY ... WERE BOTH SURPRISING AND PARADOXICAL. THE

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INFO AMEMBASSY QUITO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-COLOMBIAN RELATIONS, EVENTS IN VENEZUELA

POPULAR LEADER, A POLITICAL PHENOMENON IN HIS HALCYON DAYS, ENDED UP BEING THROWN OUT OF OFFICE BY IMPRESSIVE STREET DEMONSTRATIONS IN CARACAS ... BY AND LARGE, IT WAS CHAVEZ'S OWN ACTIONS THAT BROUGHT THINGS TO A HEAD ... HIS ABILITY TO GOVERN WAS REDUCED AS HE LOST SUPPORT AMONG THE PEOPLE AND ELICITED ACTIVE OPPOSITION BY BUSINESSMEN, THE CHURCH AND THE MEDIA ... CHALLENGING

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INTERNATIONAL OPINION, CHAVEZ CONSOLIDATED POWER AND ADOPTED AUTHORITARIAN TRAPPINGS [IN CASTRO'S IMAGE.] HE STRANGELY REACHED OUT TO LIBYA AND IRAQ, PARIAS IN THIS HEMISPHERE ESPECIALLY SINCE SEPTEMBER 11. AND, HE ADOPTED A DOUBLE STANDARD WITH RESPECT TO COLOMBIAN GUERRILLAS, JUST AS THEY LOST INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT. ALL OF THESE MADE A POPULARLY-LED COUP INEVITABLE, THUS CONFIRMING THE EXTRAORDINARY CAPACITY OF VENEZUELAN SOCIETY FOR PROTEST AND MOBILIZATION. IT WAS AN EXEMPLARY EXPERIENCE DEMONSTRATING THE CAPACITY OF DEMOCRATIC BASES TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST VERY DIFFERENT THREATS. THE ABILITY OF THE MIDDLE CLASS TO INFLUENCE THE FUTURE OF VENEZUELA IS BOTH CLEAR AND HEALTHY. SO IS THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA ... CHAVEZ'S FALL FROM POWER HAS DEEP IMPLICATIONS FOR COLOMBIA, FORTUNATELY POSITIVE. A FORMERLY HOSTILE NEIGHBOR IS NOW CLEARING THE WAY FOR RESTRUCTURING A FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONSHIP ... THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR COLOMBIA WHICH THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTRY MUST SEIZE IMMEDIATELY AND PROACTIVELY."

8. LEAD EDITORIAL IN BOGOTA'S WEEKLY "EL ESPECTADOR" (4/14) ENTITLED: "VENEZUELA'S STABILITY," STATED: "ON FRIDAY, VENEZUELA INITIATED A NEW ERA IN ITS REPUBLICAN LIFE AFTER HUGO CHAVEZ
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ABRUPTLY LEFT OFFICE FOLLOWING THE BLOODY INCIDENTS ON THURSDAY. BUT, THE CRISIS IN OUR BROTHER NATION IS NOWHERE NEAR SOLUTION. THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRATIC NORMALIZATION WON'T BE EASY. FIRST, BECAUSE THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMACY HAS BEEN QUESTIONED ... THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS WATCHING CLOSELY THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA, AND IT WILL ENSURE THAT THE [ROAD TO DEMOCRACY] IS AS TRANSPARENT AS POSSIBLE AMIDST AN ENVIRONMENT OF [POLITICAL] POLARIZATION ... CHAVEZ'S OUSTER RESULTS FROM AN ORGANIZED CIVIL SOCIETY THAT PEACEFULLY DEMANDED THAT HE LEAVE OFFICE IN THE AFTERMATH OF CRISIS IN THE STATE OIL COMPANY. CHAVEZ'S OUSTER CAME AFTER A POPULIST SPEECH [DEMONSTRATING] HIS INABILITY TO REACH CONSENSUS SOLUTIONS TO THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS ... WHAT HAPPENED [IN VENEZUELA] WAS NOT A MILITARY COUP, BUT A PEOPLE'S COUP BACKED BY THE MILITARY, AND IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY ... VENEZUELA'S STABILITY IS COLOMBIA'S STABILITY."

9. OP-ED BY POLITICAL COLUMNIST ROBERTO POSADA (D'ARTAGNAN) IN "EL TIEMPO" (4/14) ENTITLED: "THE NUT HAS LEFT," STATED: "CHAVEZ HAD BECOME A PEBBLE IN THE AMERICAN SHOE ... MAKE NO MISTAKE, CHAVEZ'S FALL IS DUE TO OIL INTERESTS."

10. OP-ED BY FORMER M-19 MEMBER AND CURRENT POLITICAL ANALYST OTTY PATINO IN "EL TIEMPO" (4/14) ENTITLED: "TEN CONCERNS," STATED: "FIRST, DID THE AMERICANS WELCOME THE COUP AGAINST CHAVEZ? DOES THAT MEAN A SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY WITH

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RESPECT TO MILITARY TAKEOVERS? ... SEVENTH, HOW MUCH MORE
CONCERNED IS THE U.S. ABOUT THE FARC AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION
ON ACCOUNT OF ITS [KIDNAPPING OF 12 DEPARTMENTAL LEGISLATORS IN
CALI ON APRIL 11]? WILL THIS MEAN A NEW U.S. STRATEGY BEYOND
PLAN COLOMBIA EMPHASIZING COUNTERTERRORISM, INSTEAD OF
COUNTERNARCOTICS? ARE WE ON THE EVE OF SEEING THE CREATION OF A
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MULTILATERAL FORCE FOR THE ANDEAN REGION?"

11. LEAD EDITORIAL IN "EL TIEMPO" (4/15) ENTITLED: "VENEZUELA:
REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS," STATED: "IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT
WHERE THE DUST WILL SETTLE AFTER RECENT DRAMATIC EVENTS IN
VENEZUELA ... THE MAJOR QUESTION IS CHAVEZ'S FUTURE ATTITUDE.
THE TONE OF HIS SPEECH ON SUNDAY ... WAS CONCILIATORY AND
DISPASSIONATE ... WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE IF AFTER THE
CURRENT CONFUSING SITUATION, CHAVEZ HEWS TO THIS SAME LINE. HIS
ATTITUDE IN RECENT MONTHS DOESN'T MAKE US OPTIMISTIC ... THE ROLE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ALSO DESERVES EXAMINATION ...
COUNTRIES LIKE THE UNITED STATES, ONE OF THE CHIEF PROPONENTS OF
MECHANISMS DISCOURAGING CHANGES IN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS,
DIDN'T HESITATE TO SUPPORT CARMONA ... OTHER NATIONS, LED BY
TROUBLED ARGENTINA, CONDEMNED A COUP BY CIVIL SOCIETY, CONCERNED
OVER THE PRECEDENT [OF LEGITIMIZING] THE EARLY REPLACEMENT OF
UNPOPULAR GOVERNMENTS ... IN ALL OF THIS, COLOMBIA CAME OUT
BADLY. IT CLEARLY EVINCE SYMPATHY TOWARDS THE ANTI-CHAVEZ
INITIATIVE. THE ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER'S REMARKS TO THE EFFECT
THAT BILATERAL RELATIONS WOULD IMPROVE WITH THE CHAVEZ'S FALL,
NOW MAKE FOR VERY COMPLICATED READING. HOWEVER THINGS COME OUT
IN THE END, CONFUSION OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS HAS PARADOXICALLY
SERVED TO AIR CONCERN ON THIS SIDE OF THE BORDER ABOUT [CHAVEZ'S]

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AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-COLOMBIAN RELATIONS, EVENTS IN
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SYMPATHY FOR THE GUERRILLAS, HIS PROTECTIONIST TENDENCIES, AND
HIS WEAK DEMOCRATIC CONVICTIONS." LEADING REGIONAL MEDIA ECHOED
"EL TIEMPO'S" SUMMATION, ALBEIT WITH GREATER CRITICISM OF
VENEZUELA'S INTERIM GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING FAILED TO EFFECTIVELY
CONSOLIDATE ITS HOLD ON POWER.

12. COLOMBIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION COVERAGE OF EVENTS IN
VENEZUELA INCLUDED EXTENDED STRAIGHT REPORTING ON THE EVENTS AS
THEY TOOK PLACE, SOME RELYING ON VENEZUELAN TELEVISION FEEDS AND
OTHERS USING THEIR OWN SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS. CARACOL RADIO
COVERAGE WAS NOTABLE FOR HAVING FEATURED INTERVIEWS WITH BOTH
PEDRO CARMONA AND HUGO CHAVEZ. PATTERSON

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